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Family Life and Customs among the Natives of Equatorial Africa
[Familieleven en zeden bij de inboorlingen van den Evenaar]

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Congo, Vol. 1, pp. 531-549
Brussels, 1922

Translated from the Flemish by Helen N. Spicy

Human Relations Area Files

1959

[Title Page]

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FAMILY LIFE AND CUSTOMS AMONG THE NATIVES OF EQUATORIAL AFRICA

5B The so-called marriage, or rather, the acquisition of a wife takes place:

1. Through a bride price to the family of the woman who is given;
2. Through buying, or the payment of an amount for a woman who is no longer in the hands of the family;
3. Through inheritance;
4. Through abduction.

Acquisition by bride price is called ongo, ojongonge: "the binding or engagement of oneself."

Acquisition by purchase is called somba, masomba: "buying."

When a woman is acquired through inheritance, the designation under which she was first acquired is retained. When the deceased father, uncle, or brother had acquired the woman by bride price or purchase, the heir will say: "I have taken this woman by bride price, purchase, etc."

Acquisition by abduction often occurred formerly in the tribal wars.

In disputes the natives often say: "He stole that woman." This is usually to announce the fact that the woman, according to them, was acquired in a dishonest manner.

The payment of bride price, purchase, etc., is usually made with a combination of money, objects, and male or female slaves.

This combined payment is called songa, masonga: "equalizing, settlement."

When a native is asked in what way he acquired his wife, he will usually say: ojoloongaki (I have paid her bride price), because he [532] knows well that this is the most honest way. There are, however, many wives who have been acquired in the other way.

583 584 Acquisition by bride price sometimes begins before the birth of the expected daughter. The man, usually a polygynist, gives something of security to the father of the child. This security

consists of a beautifully fashioned native knife, or a lance, or mitako [copper wire used as currency]. In some areas, it was the polygynist who attended the mother at the birth of the daughter. He had the wood gathered, water brought, and food prepared. If, then, the expected child was a boy, the security was usually returned, and the contract declared null and void. If, however, the one who had given the security was a village chief or a man of importance, then the father of the child tried to give him another daughter. The father had, for instance, at an earlier time given a daughter to another man of much less importance. In the above-mentioned case, he would give back the bride price received, take his daughter back, and give her to the polygynist from whom he expected a larger bride price.

Sometimes too the boy was taken by the polygynist and remained in his family until the father could trade a daughter for him.

While very young and still a child, the little daughter was installed in the harem of the polygynist. She was brought up there, together with other children of her age and status; or rather, she grew up there in the midst of these heathen customs without any upbringing.

The composition of the harem of a polygamist:

The first wife was called the Bomatsa; she preceded all the other wives in rank, and in the absence of the polygynist, she was the mistress of the harem.

The second wife was called Ekila; she was the most loved and preceded all the remaining wives. She was also called Nkonda.

The third wife was called Bolumbu. At the appointment of the Bolumbu, a certain ceremony took place, and the wife was clothed with an animal skin. The Nku, a sort of patriarch and magician, sometimes had three or four Bolumbu who served as messengers to other villages. In this capacity they had special privileges. For instance, to attack a Bolumbu was a reason for declaring war.

[533] The remaining women were simply women of the harem, without distinction.

In the area of Monjoku, among the Bolee [Bole?], the first wife was called Nkisa, with the same rank as Bomatsa. The second

595 wife was called Lonkoto. This was, however, more a category, for there were sometimes four Lonkoto in a harem. The rest were ordinary wives. Among the Ekonda, the first wife was called Nkumokonto, just like the Bomomo. The second wife was called Ekila or Nkombo. The remaining wives were the ordinary wives of the harem.

595 The first wife, Bomomo, always remained at home and never
* 697 left the harem. The second, Ekila or Nkombo, accompanied the polygynist everywhere; she was at his side on all his trips. The Bokumbu usually were completely alone to do errands in other villages.

595 These old customs of priority among the wives are now gradually beginning to disappear.

697 It was forbidden under severe penalty to have relations with the first, second, or third wife of the polygynist. The penalties were death, slavery, or a large fine.

This was their law concerning adultery, enforced with severe punishment.

595 The ordinary wives of the harem were less strictly guarded.
837 This often depended on the jealousy or indifference of the polygynist. Anyone who had relations with these wives had to pay a fine, or rather, a price of prostitution. Since the wives were almost all in the possession of the polygynists, there were naturally many men without a wife. These, then, often had relations with the ordinary wives of the polygynists. Also, the sons of the polygynist had relations with them; the polygynist himself sometimes even had relations with the ordinary wives of his neighbor. This was the bad consequence and the immorality of polygyny.

595 It is easy to understand that the ordinary wives of the polygynist,
536 having relations with others, often left their husband, or rather, their master in order to go to another. The ordinary wives constituted the largest number. It is because of this that one now finds many women who have had three or four, sometimes even seven, different husbands in succession. Among some tribes, [534] the Ekonda among them, they were stricter; a wife who had already left her husband or master two or more times was considered to have little worth.

567 The female slaves who were taken in war were given by the
595 polygynist to his male slaves as wives. They could also be installed in the harem among the ordinary wives. Their children could have the same rights as the other children of the polygynist

600 the same rights as the other children of the polygynist.

595 The polygynist always sought to increase the number of his
656 wives, for his prestige rose and his fortune increased in that manner.
593 If anyone in civilized lands seeks to enlarge his fortune, this is done, people say, in order to insure the future of his children. The native thinks little about that; his primary idea is to enjoy himself and to surpass others in prestige and esteem. As far as the future of his children is concerned, there are polygynists who possess twenty or thirty wives or even more, and sometimes they have only one or two children. Also it is little in keeping with their notions to care for the future; he who is still alive tomorrow must take care of

595 tomorrow then, so they reason. On the contrary, instead of caring
593 for his children, the polygynist often took great trouble to obtain a
594 wife for his son. The son, however, was not yet the owner of his
606 wife; it was, so to speak, only a loan. Not until after the death of his father did he become owner. In some districts, when the father had obtained a wife for his son, he first kept this wife for some time for himself. Only after a few months did he give her to his son. In

595 other districts, when the wife was pregnant by the son, he was obliged
593 to send her for a few days to his father. He was not allowed to bear
606 the honor of fatherhood alone; his father must share that with him.
842 The father reserved for himself the honor of naming all of the chil-
551 dren of his children. In some areas of the Congo, morals were so
835 low and common that the father even kept his own daughters in his harem. This did not occur in Equatorial Africa, but there was a custom that was not much better. The magician was sometimes

583 consulted about the bride price which the father tried to get for his
791 daughter, or the brother for his sister.

The magician then gave them the advice that they themselves should first have relations with their own daughter or sister. This custom existed almost everywhere in Equatorial Africa.

583 [535] Bride Price. In general, the daughter was given in marriage upon payment of a bride price. The father had little choice of the future husband of his daughter. The one who guaranteed the most goods in payment was certain to get her. Since, in most cases, the little daughter had not yet arrived at the years of maturity, there was naturally no question of her consent. The bride price was not paid all at once, but gradually during the years while the daughter grew up. Since the daughter was given without her consent

583 to an old, worn-out, gray-haired man, it naturally often occurred that when she arrived at maturity, she no longer wished to remain with him. She therefore left him and went to another, or back to her family. In the former case, however, great difficulties arose concerning the return of the bride price. Indeed, with the bride price the father had received for his daughter, he bought himself another wife. This wife was then called the Nkita of the daughter. We could translate Nkita in this case as "substitute." The Nkita represented the value of the sold or married daughter. Meanwhile, the daughter herself was often the Nkita of the daughter or sister of her husband. Thus, many women were the Nkita of each other. According to their customs the children (boys) were in theory the heirs of the Nkita of their mother. The Nkita was, in fact, the value or the bride price of their mother.

One might ask whether the wife was then always content that she was, so to speak, an object of trade. In general, yes, she was satisfied with this. This is how the customs were, and nobody gave a thought to changing them. Usually the wife simply found herself in an arranged situation (fait accompli). Gradually a certain sense of honor is coming into being among the Christian wives against these heathen customs.

If the woman desired that a large bride price or purchase price be paid for her, was it also because she wished to care for the future of her children who would be heirs of her bride price? No, they say, not for that reason -- for, they add, what women knew in advance that she would have children, and moreover boys? There [163] are, in fact, many women who have no children. Also, [536] only 583 the boys are eligible for the inheritance; the girls are heirs only in 638 name. When it came to the inheritance, the children inherited the 587 Nkita of their mother only if there were no more brothers of the mother or uncles on their father's side. The mightiest always had the greatest right.

Usually a youth had to acquire a wife with the bride price or supplement of the bride price of his sister. The inheritance of the Nkita of his mother was only secondary. Still we often see a heathen wife leave her husband in order to go to another, without bothering much about her children who remain with the deserted husband, their father.

If the wife was content and if she insisted that a large bride price be paid for her, it was out of vanity and also to procure money for her family (father or brothers), and not out of concern for her children.

Divorce. When the wife left her husband to go back to her family, they had to give back the bride price they had received. In general this was a very difficult business, because the bride price was used by the father or the brother to obtain another wife for himself, the Nkita. Thus, in order to be able to return the bride price, they would have to sell this Nkita or give her back to her family and ask for the return of her bride price. There were few other ways to give back the bride price; all their property consisted of wives. Since the family usually could not or would not return the bride price, the deserted husband then sought to become the master of the mother or a sister of his runaway wife, whom he then kept as a hostage. Among the heathens, this was a commonly used expedient to retrieve the wife or the bride price. When the runaway wife discovered that her mother or sister was a prisoner of her former husband, she often went back out of sympathy for her mother or sister. When the wife had gone not to her family but to another man, which was often the case, the family urged this second husband to give the bride price to the first husband. This was usually the only practical means by which the difficulty was resolved. This second husband then paid the bride price to the first. Since the [537] bride price often had been only paid in part by the first one, he then paid the remaining portion to the family.

Sometimes, if there were no way to return the bride price, the woman was forced to go back to her deserted husband. To avoid unpleasant treatment, she had to feign submissiveness.

As soon as an agreement was arrived at, either with the family or with the second husband, over the return of the bride price, the first bond was considered broken. If the woman was with her family, she was considered free to enter into a new agreement. If, however, she was with another husband, then after the argument she was considered bound to that second husband. The primary bond of their agreement thus appears to be the bride price.

If the wife had children, these remained with their father, and the bride price was only partially returned. The value of the children was, so to speak, subtracted from the bride price.

When a wife of a polygynist had illicit relations with another man of the same village, this was called Bomoombo. When she had such relations with a man of another village, this was called Inoke. As we have observed, the ordinary wives of the harem often had such relations. When the woman eloped with her bomoombo or inoke, or with whomever it was, she was pursued by her husband or owner, who tried to get her back. If the wife refused, negotiations over the bride price began.

If an agreement was reached or if a pledge was given as guarantee for the payment, the first bond was considered broken, and the woman was considered bound to this second man, even though he had been her bomoombo or inoke.

It might also happen that the first husband was so jealous that he did not want to make any agreement; then he attempted to kill either the guilty wife or her second husband. If the woman became ill at the home of her husband, he went to tell her family and had to give a security to the family.

Often the family came to get the wife, in order to be able to care for her better. If, in such a case, the wife [538] died at the home of her family, there were no further difficulties about the bride price, according to their customs. If, however, the bride price had still not been completely paid, the family asked their son-in-law to pay the remainder.

In recent times, now that the heathen customs have been undermined by the European occupation, we see that the husbands whose wives have gone to their family when sick and have died there, demand the return of the bride price from the family, but this is completely contrary to their old customs. In one case the husband could demand the return of the bride price, namely, if the wife had left while healthy to go to her family and had died there.

Buying or Trading of Women. The woman was also in many cases an acknowledged object of trade. The great village chiefs, among others Ibuka and Yoma, of whom we shall speak further, carried on a sort of woman trade. With European articles and also native currency, they went to other districts of the Equator [Province] to buy women with them, just like someone who goes to market, even though no public markets where women were sold actually existed.

Everywhere there were also abducted women and female slaves, these were simply sold. Furthermore women were bought and sold with women [as payment]. Also women who were inherited and no longer in the hands of their family were sold by their second, third, or other subsequent husband. In all of these cases, the family no longer came into consideration for the bride price. One would have to stretch the point in order to consider the same paid in these cases as a bride price, and consequently as a native custom which one must respect.

Or one should have to assume that such a native woman remains a "bride" for her whole lifetime. It will be said that the woman consented to her sale by one man to the other.

Often this was indeed the case, but not always by any means, for children and slaves were also sold. Even the consent of the woman did not prevent it from being a sale; her consent was rather an extra precaution that simplified the sale of a human article of trade. It still remains woman trade.

The Inheritance. Upon the death of a polygynist, the burial ceremony was conducted according to the class and rank of the deceased. One or two or several [528] slaves were killed and buried with the polygynist in the same grave. Sometimes the arms and legs of these male and female slaves were broken, and then they were buried alive in the same grave with the body.

When these slaves still had family, it might happen that the family members, having learned of the unfortunate lot of their relative, would hasten from faraway districts to buy him or her free if it was not yet too late. Several Negroes have told us of those heartbreaking scenes at which they were present as children. The mourning and the lamenting over the dead lasted from a week to a month.

The oldest son immediately succeeded his father in position and immediately took one of the wives of his father.

The other sons divided among them the lances and knives of their father.

If the deceased had left no son, or if he was still too young, the oldest brother succeeded the deceased. All of the wives had to remain in their own home, except the wife who was immediately taken by the oldest son. They were obliged to await the day of the distribution. This day was put off for from one to four months.

Meanwhile, these wives were subjected to a certain discipline. They were called bituka, which we translate here as "widow." During this time they were allowed to speak with the relatives of the deceased, but they had to remain at home; it was not permitted for anyone to take these wives.

When the time came for the distribution, the one in charge, namely, the son or the brother of the deceased, called together the heirs and parties concerned. On the day of the distribution, in the morning before dawn, the bituka left their dwelling place and went to the men with whom they had already come to an agreement, so that by daybreak all the huts of the bituka stood empty. Each of the wives of the polygynist usually has her own hut. At the appointed hour, the meeting was announced by the usual beating of the tomtom. The wives, the heirs, and all parties concerned then came together.

If there were many wives to distribute, the order of distribution was as follows: in the first place the brothers of the deceased received their share; in the second [540] place come the sons; and in the third place, the grandsons, that is, the sons of the daughters who received their share from the Nkita of their mother. If at this time the wife did not want to go with the man for whom she was designated, she was sold to another. Sometimes the family of the wife was not satisfied with that, and if they could, they gave the bride price back in order thereby to free their daughter or sister. Such a wife then came back to her family, where, however, she was again married in return for another bride price. The family acted thus to prevent its daughter or sister from simply being sold. When the grandsons were still too young, their share of the Nkita of their mother went to their uncle, the son of the deceased. The latter had then to provide a wife for them later, which he usually never did without making a great deal of trouble. If the daughters had no sons who could inherit their Nkita, they received some of the father's personal property as inheritance: goats, dogs, lances, knives, brass, etc. If the deceased had left a daughter but no sons or brothers, the daughter had to supervise the distribution of the inheritance.

Our civilized idea that the wife, the mother of the family, is the first heir, is thus not taken into consideration there. Indeed, the wife, the mother herself, is inherited if she is not too old.

What is one to do if even in such cases it is taught, "One must respect" the native customs?

587 428 [587] The inheriting of wives existed everywhere; it was, in fact, the only wealth left behind by the native. The details of the distribution differed according to district or tribe. Thus, for instance, in some districts it was the eldest son who alone inherited all of the wives of his father. This was in order to preserve the rank and the clan of the family. Prestige and power actually depended only on the number of wives that one possessed. In this case, however, this eldest son had, in place of his father, to provide a wife for his younger brothers and the sons of his sisters. As far as impediments [587] to marriage were concerned, generally they strictly observed the impediment of blood relationship; two blood relatives, even in a distant degree, should never enter into marriage, [541] with the exception of the irregularities mentioned above. As for relatives by marriage, there do not exist for them in any degree. There is, nevertheless, one case that somewhat resembles relationship by marriage, namely, the Nkita might never be in the home of a man together with the woman whose Nkita she was. Thus, the son-in-law or the brother-in-law might never take the Nkita of his wife into his home. If, however, the wife had left or died, there was no further impediment.

587 428 431 When, like the inheritance above, the family had returned the bride price and had then married the woman to another man, this second husband also had to give a gift to the one who, according to the law of inheritance, had the right to the wife. This gift was called a bumpanga.

587 428 If the wife who was freed by the family had children, only a part of the bride price had to be returned. Sometimes the wife was freed completely through her children. The children then remained with the family of the deceased husband, and they then represented the value of the bride price of their mother. If, however, such a woman was married again by her family, they demanded a second bride price for that.

587 428 583 Sometimes a single woman was the Nkita of several other women. In the inheritance several people then had a right over her, and everyone demanded his share. For instance, a young man

had to acquire a wife with the bride price or with a supplement of the bride price of his sisters. Three of his sisters, for instance, were married, and he needed 3,000 mitoko to pay for his intended wife. Now he went with presents to his three brothers-in-law and asked for 1,000 mitoko from each of them. The bride price was already paid to the father; the 1,000 mitoko that he asks are a supplement of the bride price.

With these 3,000 mitoko, our young man pays for his wife. This wife now becomes the Nkita of the three sisters. If this young man dies, his three sisters and his three brothers-in-law all demand their share back from the widow. If she is sold, the price must be divided among the three brothers-in-law. If she remains in the family of her husband, with the uncle or brother, she continues to be the Nkita of her three sisters-in-law.

[542] There also exists a general rule and custom that the family which has received the bride price regularly give gifts to their daughter and son-in-law or sister and brother-in-law. These gifts consisted of goats, dogs (which also have a rather large value among the natives), ducks, etc., but the gifts never consisted of money. These gifts were in turn given by the son-in-law or brother-in-law to the one who had helped him pay the bride price.

For instance, if the young man of whom we just spoke received gifts from the family of his wife, he would then have given these gifts to his three brothers-in-law. These gifts were often so much that the value of them was almost equal to the bride price that the man had paid for his wife. Custom demanded, in such a case, that the man then pay a supplement to the bride price.

In case the bride price had to be given back, the gifts that the family had already given might be subtracted from the bride price. When such disputes are brought before a European, it is difficult for him to settle them, for the value is tremendously exaggerated by the parties. The husband will demand the return of a much larger bride price than he actually gave, while the family on its side will estimate the gifts that they had given as much higher than the actual value or amount.

Something about prices, the bride price for wives, and native money value.

Their first original money was as follows.

1. Nenkete: this was thin iron or copper wire rolled into small rings; the thickness of the wire was about 3 millimeters; the length, 20 to 25 centimeters.

2. Ringwele: iron or copper bars about 6 millimeters thick and 15 centimeters long; these are still in use in Bikoro.

3. Bokete: copper wire; thickness about 7 or 8 millimeters, and 1 meter or 1.50 meters long; spiral shaped; the women wore these rolled around their legs as copper leggings.

[343] 4. Bilonge: copper rings which served as arm bands and foot bands and also as collars. The size differed for small or large persons; the weight is from one half kilo to 3 kilos.

5. Mitoko: copper wire about 4 millimeters thick and 25 centimeters long, usually bent like a hairpin. The mitoko served as a uniform currency, from which the other values and prices were reckoned, like the franc with us. The value of the mitoko was formerly reckoned at five centimes.

Formerly the bride price, which was paid for a wife in almost all of Equatorial Africa, was from 5 to 20 bekonge. (The value of the bekonge differed greatly according to the weight. The average value, however, is estimated at 2.50 francs.) This payment was further supplemented with slaves or wives. This manner of payment and the bride price still exist in the districts where the natives have not yet, or practically not, come in contact with Europeans. Also, it was sometimes paid with only slaves or women. The price for one female slave was relatively much less than for another woman.

Through the occupation of the Congo by Europeans, the family life of the natives has necessarily undergone great changes, and their customs and habits as well.

In the first place the natives have found themselves deprived of their wives by the sentinels of the Independent Congo State. These black sentinels, appointed in the villages by the State to supervise the reaping of caoutchouc, assumed an unlimited power. They took as many wives of the natives as they chose and did not pay for a single one.

Next many black soldiers, servant boys, and workmen of the Europeans also took wives everywhere in the beginning, without bothering about the native customs, that is, without paying for those wives; and this often happened under the protective power of their Whites.

We can add to that also a large number of black women who become the famous "housekeepers" of the Europeans. Although payment for these women was usually given to their owners, they were still withdrawn from the family life and the native customs. Finally, the Christian women, who now live in Christian marriage, must also be mentioned.

In addition, the price of wives and the bride price have [344] undergone great changes, primarily in those districts where the natives come into more immediate contact with Europeans. Before the arrival of the Europeans, their main medium of payment was the woman herself; a woman was paid for with a woman. Now it is forbidden to use women as currency. Therefore the natives have raised the price in the payment of bokanga and mitako.

In some districts close to the European centers, the natives have brought the price for wives and the bride price to a height never before known. For one wife they ask several nkesi.

A nkesi is 10,000 mitako. Such a sum is much too high in relation to their means. In a village there are, for instance, 30 women; for one woman, 40,000 to 50,000 mitako are asked, while at present in the whole village together the sum of 50,000 mitako is no more to be found. Therefore to oblige someone to pay two or three nkesi is usually to make it impossible for him to pay, or rather to make it necessary for him to pay with women, which is nothing else than encouraging women trade, which then occurs.

A remark should also be made here about the nomenclature of the numerals. Nkesi is not a word of the Equatorial peoples; it was brought in from elsewhere with the Europeans. Their amounts were as follows:

10 was lum or bonkoma;

100 was nkeso; and with the arrival of the Whites and foreign population came

1,000 nkesi.

The present numerical value is: 10, lum; 100, bonkoma; 1,000, nkeso; and 10,000, nkesi. Some very old Negroes, however, still say bonkoma for 10.

This is the probable origin of the great rise in price of wives, [345] especially in the area of Coquilhatville.

When the first Europeans arrived at Leopoldville and Brazzaville, it was not long before European materials and other articles also came to Coquilhatville to the hands of the great village chiefs who carried on trade on the rivers, primarily in slaves and ivory. The village chiefs, Yoma from the village of Boyeka, Ilinka of Boyeka, Yombo of [Ikili] Eala, Nkoko of Bokala, etc., carried these European articles up the Tshuapa and Ikelemba rivers, and they bought slaves and wives with them.

Returning home again, they bought wives from their own district and paid for them with the slaves and women whom they themselves had bought cheaply with the European articles. For one woman of their district they paid three or four women. The arrival of the Whites and foreign Blacks acquainted them with the number nkesi which, however, in their definition was only 1,000 and which they formerly called 10 nkama or 10 times 100.

It was not long before the Europeans had to concern themselves with heaving disputes over the wives. In the Black land such a thing is unavoidable. Whenever the Blacks came to the Whites with their disputes, they dared not or would not say, "I paid for this woman with three women, but they said, "I paid for this woman with three nkesi," that is, 3 times 1,000 mitako. Meanwhile, the nkoto and nkesi acquired their value of 1,000 and 10,000. The statement, however, that a woman was paid for with nkesi was retained, through the error of the Whites or through the greed of the polygynists or both. Indeed, later some women were paid for with nkesi, namely, when the prevalent currency in the Congo was the mitako. It was also no wonder, for the polygynists had a monopoly on the wives, and it was to their advantage to raise the price.

Therefore, if the native of Coquilhatville says now that his father or his uncle paid for that woman with three or four nkesi, this generally means that the wife was paid for with three or four women. The price of the women in Wangata, near Coquilhatville, was formerly no higher than in the other areas. Many women were paid for with only five bakonga, for instance, in Bokala, near Bamania, a village which belonged to the village chief Yoma of Boyeka.

It should also be noted that the nkesi which have been paid in recent years in Wangata have been paid not in mitako or in

currency, but in articles on which the natives fix a conventional price, usually much higher than the actual value. Thus, for instance, a pataki, or piston rifle, was always reckoned at 2,000 mitako. It did not matter that it was only worth 1,500. There are, [546] therefore, only very few women who are paid for with akasi in real currency or mitako.

The tragic result of this exaggerated rise in prices is that the mutual debts and difficulties among the natives have been increased, so that they are almost impossible to solve. In the attempt to settle a dispute, five other disputes come into it, all equally complicated, for the simple reason that the money, the mitako, to be paid does not exist, and it is forbidden to pay with women. To settle a dispute, several months are sometimes necessary, or a whole year. Other disputes never end, but pass on from father to son and are brought by each one in turn before each new District Administrator. In the districts where the bride price has not been raised, the difficulties and disputes are not nearly so numerous and are easy to solve. In the districts where the purchase price and the bride price of the women have become excessively high, the natives themselves admit that their disputes could formerly be solved easily, but that this is at present almost impossible.

It is unnecessary to say that this situation is harmful to the task of civilizing [the country] and to the mutual good relations of the natives. The natives are constantly coming to the District Administrator of the area to lay before him their disputes over women who have not been paid for. These disputes take up a great deal of the costly time of the administrator. He must hear and settle these usually very complicated disputes, for often the general peace of a village or district depends on it.

Also the natives themselves spend whole days and weeks doing nothing besides holding meetings to discuss the unpayable debts of bride price and the purchase price of wives, simply because the prices are excessive. For lack of currency, they pay each other with each other's debts, which usually complicates the business even more.

To improve this condition, the price of women and the bride price should be lowered, greatly lowered. We have seen that this was possible and practical when once a District Administrator who knew the native customs very well in the area of Coquilhatville really began to do it.

209 [547] Unfortunately the system was not continued. Also, it must not be said that it would be unjust to lower the price of the women. Rather, injustice would thus be redressed, a degenerate custom be improved. Through the present system, ever more injustice is committed and suffered.

583 A few polygynists would suffer some material loss through
586 the lowering of the price of the women, namely, by receiving less for one woman than they (sometimes) paid for them, for they inherited most of the women. But they are also the ones who are responsible for the irregular situation. In a large part of the district, the polygynists are by far the minority of the population. They are the ones who are hostile to the Colonial Administration. They are in possession of the women and have a monopoly on them. They fix prices which a young man can almost never pay, namely, two ehesi at least.

583 The difficulties for Christian marriages become daily still more difficult. This is true for the marriages already entered into and for the future marriages.

583 The bride price to be paid for the wife ought to be such that
424 every young man can pay that sum with his own money, with the
424 money that he has earned himself by his work. This sum cannot
425 be high, for the ordinary working man in the Congo, who makes up
511] the large part of the population, does not earn much more than what he needs for board and clothing. Therefore to pay an excessively large sum as a bride price forces him to borrow and to run up debts among his relatives and friends. The result of this is that the system of the Nkita goes over unnoticed into the Christian marriages, and the woman remains an object for inheritance. Indeed, when the man dies the creditors will come, namely, those who have loaned him money -- and demand the wife. The disputes over the bride price then begin anew, and they will again give the wife in marriage in return for a new bride price. Thus, there is no end to it. The wife, the mother, will never achieve any rights but will always remain an object of inheritance. There has been talk about declaring the widow free at the death of her husband in order to prevent the inheriting of wives, but how will it be possible to [548] achieve that if the bride price is not lessened, considerably lessened? When a

583 428 426 young man can pay for his wife, or rather pay her bride price with his own earned money, then that wife becomes his property. At his death, no creditors or mortgage holders can come to demand the wife since she will then actually be free. There will also be no difficulty in making her heir to the property of her husband, for herself and her children. The bride price or payment for wives among the civilized Blacks could be very much simplified. To abolish it would not be so easy. Indeed, it seems to be in the customs and the habits of the whole Black race. Then too, with respect to bride price, usually still in entanglements with their heathen relatives.

The bride price, as it exists among the heathens, will always remain a source of difficulties for civilization and a support for polygyny.

000 When the price is lowered, the large number of wives of polygynists will be seen to disperse and go to the men who have no wife. Thus, single marriages will be increased, and the district, whose population is greatly decreased, will become populated again. Lowering the price will also prevent women being paid for with women; and thus the trading of women will be hindered, since then the whole bride price can be paid in currency. It is also anticipated that the woman will become less a material object; and by changing the wife from an object of inheritance to an heiress, her moral value will be raised in her own eyes and in the eyes of the men.

In order to civilize the land, Christian marriages must be established. In order to establish Christian marriages, the impediments that stand in the way must be removed, and everything be put to work to benefit what the good outcome of that can assure.

[549] Family Nomenclature

601

The name of:	is given to:
Ise, father	one's own father brothers of the father sons and grandsons of father's sisters

60| The name of: is given to:

Ngoya / Nyango mother	one's own mother sisters of the mother
Bana, children	one's own children children of brothers or sisters children of mother's brothers grandchildren of mother's brothers
Nkoko-nyango, grandparent	grandfather and grandmother brothers and sisters of grandfather and grandmother children and grandchildren of grandfather's sisters
Nkan'ea jenda, brother / Nkan'ey'omoto, sister	by natural brothers and sisters to: the children of two brothers the children of two sisters
Nkana l'ontamba	an expression for "one's own brother and sister
Botomolo	older brother or sister
Bokune	younger brother or sister
	(also used for older or younger contemporaries)
Nyang-obika (1), uncle / Ngompame	the brothers of mother

1. We could translate Nyangobika as male mother.

601

The name of:	is given to:
Ise-omoto (2), aunt	the sisters of father the daughters of father's sisters the granddaughters of father's sisters

2. We could translate Iseomoto as female father.

Bokilo	son-in-law, brother-in-law, father-in-law, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law
Nkita, substitute	by the daughter to: the extra wife of her father, bought with her bride price her sister-in-law or extra wife of her brother, bought with her bride price